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THE GREAT WAVES OF DEMOCRACY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A LECTURE BY

Dr. John Markoff

University of Pittsburgh

Friday,
31 January 1991
at 3:00 p.m.

Room 738

Leacock Building
McGill University

A multicontinental series of regime transitions began in southern Europe in the 1970s, swept South America and parts of Asia in the 1980s, and caught the world's attention in central and eastern Europe in 1989. In the early 1990s movements claiming to be democratic are very much alive in the geographically diverse group of countries whose only common element is their extreme poverty: Haiti, a number of African and Middle Eastern cases, Burma. This great wave constitutes a major challenge to prevailing theories of the social roots of democracy. Yet this is not the first such wave, although it is the largest. We need to understand why democracy has advanced by waves, starting with the 1780s and 1790s when the word moved from learned debates into the streets.

Dr. Markoff will look at the confluence of several processes: the powerful role of transnational models of legitimate political order whose rise or fall has enormous repercussions for weakly legitimated mimetic regimes; the cyclical character of social movements; and the capacity of political systems to develop creative fusions of authoritarian and democratic elements.

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